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ABSTRACT

Gilligan (1982) proposed that men and women have different moral ideologies, that men use a logic of rights and rules while women use a logic of care and relationships. Russ and Alexander (1984) found significant sex differences in their research on justice, such that women responded more positively to overreward or more negatively to underreward than did men. Since the Russ and Alexander study used an exchange situation, a study was conducted to determine whether similar effects would occur in a communal situation. Male (N=169) and female (N=184) junior high school, high school, and college students read a scenario in which parents allocated money to their teenage children. There were three equity conditions: overreward, underreward, and just reward. After reading the scenario, subjects completed a questionnaire which included the key dependent variable of perceived fairness of the allocated reward. The results revealed a significant sex x inequity interaction on the measure of perceived fairness. Female subjects perceived overreward as being fairer, and underreward as being more unfair, than did male subjects. These results in a communal situation replicated Russ and Alexander's exchange situation results and are congruent with Gilligan's hypothesis about male-female moral ideologies. (Author/NB)

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Sex Differences in the Perception of Injustice or Inequity

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ABSTRACT

GILLIGAN (1982) PROPOSED THAT MEN AND WOMEN HAVE TWO DIFFERENT MORAL IDEOLOGIES: MEN USE A LOGIC OF RIGHTS AND RULES WHILE WOMEN USE A LOGIC OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS. IN RESEARCH ON JUSTICE IT HAS BEEN REPORTED THAT MEN PREFER AN EQUITY RULE WHILE WOMEN PREFER AN EQUALITY RULE (KAHN, ET AL., 1980). MAJOR & DEAUX (1982) CONCLUDED THAT SUCH SEX DIFFERENCES WERE FOUND ONLY WHEN THE ALLOCATOR WAS ALSO A CO-RECIPIENT OF THE REWARD. HOWEVER, RUSS & ALEXANDER (1984) FOUND SIGNIFICANT SEX DIFFERENCES WHEN THE PERSON WAS NEITHER AN ALLOCATOR NOR A RECIPIENT OF REWARD. TWO TYPES OF INEQUITY WERE USED: OVERREWARD, WHERE THE RECIPIENT GOT MORE THAN WAS FAIR, AND UNDERREWARD, WHERE THE RECIPIENT GOT LESS THAN WAS FAIR. RESULTS SHOWED A SIGNIFICANT SEX X INEQUITY INTERACTION. WOMEN RESPONDED MORE POSITIVELY THAN MEN TO OVERREWARD AND MORE NEGATIVELY TO UNDERREWARD.

CLARK & MILLS (1979) HAVE DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN COMMUNAL AND EXCHANGE RELATIONSHIPS AND HAVE FOUND IMPORTANT EMPIRICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEM. RUSS & ALEXANDER USED AN EXCHANGE SITUATION IN THEIR STUDY WHICH FOUND DIFFERENCES IN MALE-FEMALE RESPONSES TO INEQUITY. THE QUESTION ADDRESSED BY THE PRESENT STUDY WAS WHETHER THESE EFFECTS WOULD OCCUR IN A VERY DIFFERENT TYPE OF SOCIAL SITUATION--ONE INVOLVING COMMUNAL RATHER THAN EXCHANGE RELATIONSHIPS.

THE KEY DEPENDENT VARIABLE WAS PERCEIVED FAIRNESS OF THE ALLOCATED REWARD. SUBJECTS TOOK PART IN A SIMULATION EXPERIMENT INVOLVING A FAMILY SITUATION IN WHICH PARENTS ALLOCATED REWARDS TO THEIR CHILDREN. TWO TYPES OF INEQUITY WERE USED: OVERREWARD AND UNDERREWARD.

THERE WAS A SIGNIFICANT SEX X INEQUITY INTERACTION ON THE KEY MEASURE OF PERCEIVED FAIRNESS. WOMEN PERCEIVED OVERREWARD AS BEING FAIRER THAN DID MEN. THE RESULTS FOR THE UNDERREWARD CONDITION WERE JUST THE OPPOSITE. WOMEN PERCEIVED UNDERREWARD MORE NEGATIVELY THAN DID MEN. THESE RESULTS IN A COMMUNAL SITUATION REPLICATE THE RESULTS OF RUSS & ALEXANDER IN AN EXCHANGE SITUATION. BOTH FINDINGS ARE CONGRUENT WITH GILLIGAN'S HYPOTHESIS ABOUT MALE-FEMALE MORAL IDEOLOGIES.

Introduction

Carol Gilligan in her volume In A Difference Voice (1982) proposed that men and women tend to have two different moral ideologies: Men using a logic of rights and rules, women using a logic of care and relationships. That is, women's morality is more person-centered, men's is more abstract. In the research literature on justice and fairness it has been reported that men prefer an equity rule (rewards should be proportional to contributions), while women prefer an equality rule (equal sharing of rewards) (Kahn, et al., 1980). Major & Deaux (1982) concluded that such sex differences were found only when an allocator was also a co-recipient of the available rewards.

However, Russ & Alexander (1984) reported significant sex differences in perceived fairness even where the respondent was neither an allocator nor a recipient of the reward. The situation involved a college class in which a student received a grade from a teacher. The research subjects read about the allocation, but were not participants. Two types of inequity were used: Overreward, where the recipient got a higher grade than was fair, and Underreward where the recipient got a lower grade than was fair. For the dependent variable Perceived Fairness of the Outcome (grade received) there was a significant sex x inequity interaction. Women responded more negatively than men to Underreward and more positively to Overreward. That is, women perceived the Overreward as being fairer than did men; and women perceived underreward as being less fair than did men.

These results were supported in a study by Tolson (1986). Tolson's allocation context involved a work situation in which an employee received a pay raise. Again, the subjects read about the allocation, but did not actually receive one. Tolson found that for the dependent variable of Perceived Fairness of the Supervisor there was a significant sex x inequity interaction. Women responded more negatively than men to Underreward and more positively than men to Overreward.

Clark and Mills (1979) have distinguished between communal and exchange relationships and have found important empirical differences between them. Communal relationships involve feeling special responsibility for another's welfare and responding to another's needs (e.g., as in relations between friends, lovers, relatives, etc.). Exchange relations involve expectations of exchange or reciprocity with no special responsibility for the other's welfare (e.g., business relationships). The college setting used by Russ & Alexander (1984) and the work setting used by Tolson (1986) would both appear to fit the definition of exchange settings. The sex x inequity results they obtained within exchange contexts were congruent with Gilligan's hypothesis about male-female differences in moral ideology. In the present study we ask whether the same male-female differences in perceived fairness will occur in a very different type of social setting—one involving communal relationships.

Procedure

The subjects were 353 male and female college, high school, and junior high school students in a major metropolitan area in the midwest. There were 169 males and 184 females. Each subject served in only one treatment condition. A simulation procedure derived from similar justice investigations (e.g., Alexander & Ruse, 1985; Tolson, 1986) was used. The subject read a scenario which described a family situation in which parents allocated money to their teenage children. There were three equity conditions: Overreward (inequitably high outcome), Underreward (inequitably low outcome), and Just reward (equitable outcome). After the experimental treatment, subjects responded to a 22 item questionnaire which included the key dependent variable of perceived fairness of the allocated reward.

Results

There were two types of inequity presented in this experiment--Underreward, where recipients get much less than they deserve, and Overreward, where recipients get much more than they deserve. Both Over and Underreward are typically seen by subjects as less fair than a Just Reward (where recipients get exactly what they deserve). Subjects in this experiment, as in others, rated the Just Reward as fairer than either Underreward or Overreward, and this was true for both men and women (Table 1). However, there also was a statistically significant sex x inequity interaction on the key dependent variable of perceived fairness. This result demonstrated that the type of inequity had different effects on men and women (Table 1). The women perceived Underreward as being less fair than did men, but perceived Overreward as being more fair than did the men. Looked at in another way, the results show that men perceived Underreward and Overreward as equally unfair, whereas women perceived Underreward as much more unfair than Overreward.

Discussion

This study used a communal situation (parents and their children) where allocators of resources are concerned about the welfare and needs of the recipients. The findings in this family context replicated the results which had been obtained by Russ & Alexander (1984) and Tolson (1986) with exchange situations. With the present experiment, there now have been three studies yielding the same results despite the use of three different allocation contexts. In viewing inequitable and unjust situations, women respond more positively than men to the unfair overreward of other people, and more negatively than men to the unfair underreward of other people. These findings hold up whether the allocation recipients are workers, college students or children.

The results of the present study, as well as the two earlier ones on this issue, appear to be quite congruent with Gilligan's hypothesis about differences between male and female moral ideologies. These results are consistent with the hypothesis that in making justice judgements women are more attuned to caring relationships, and men focus more on rights and rules. The results are also consistent with the view that women are more interpersonally responsive to others than are men (Swap & Rubin, 1983).

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Table 1

Mean Scores on Perceived Fairness of the Allocated Reward

	Over Reward	Just Reward	Under Reward
Men	4.35	4.75	4.33
	(N=54)	(N=63)	(N=52)
Women	4.73	5.18	3.97
	(N=64)	(N=55)	(N=65)

Total N=353